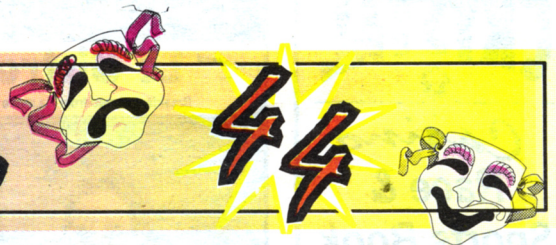


CARNIVAL

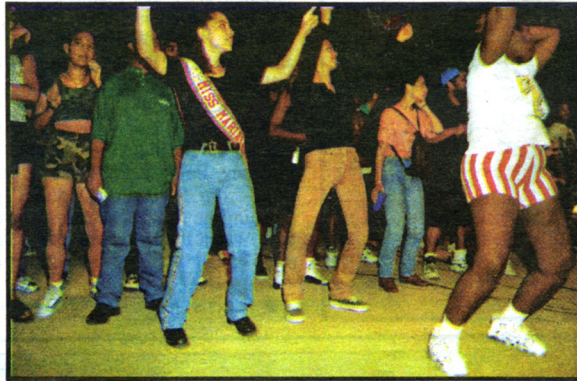


Jam-back moves upfront in Aruba roadmarch

By VANJA ODUBER
Special to Aruba Today

Shouts "Hold up! Hold up!" reverberated from the stage of the J&E Laveist Sports Park, as the members of the Taxx band opened their fourth roadmarch song Wednesday night during the first pre-selection night of Aruba Calypso and Roadmarch Contest. The lead singer Errol de Freitas (alias Lord Challenger in carnival season), and four other band members, waved plastic guns in the air singing, "Whacha gonna do if you catch a thief in your house/ Give him the money/ Give him the money," to the rhythm of techno hip hop, called jam-back, the latest trend in carnival music to hit Aruba.

The lyrics referred to the recent incident involving a San Nicolas restaurant owner who has been, allegedly, repeatedly robbed by one and the same thief; when he caught the thief he beat him up with a baseball bat, and ended up spending 10 days in jail on the



Left: Taxx band lead singer Errol de Freitas delivers Hold Up roadmarch that ridicules a recent incident involving a San Nicolas businessman and a thief, Wednesday during first pre-selection night for the finals of Aruba Calypso and Roadmarch Contest, scheduled to take place this Saturday at the newly renovated Joe Laveist Sports Park in San Nicolas. Taxx is one of the local bands that are incorporating the jam-back rhythms of the British Caribbean islands into Aruban roadmarch. Above: the public Wednesday night showed that the new trend is gaining on popularity, especially among the younger generations.

charges of battery with intent. The incident has stirred the Aruban community when it occurred two weeks ago. And while the last comments pro and contra the right to defend your property were still echoing, the song about it was made.

Taxx presentation consisted of five songs, all based on the jam-back rhythm but inventively adapted to Aruban roadmarch style, geared toward Latin music influences of salsa and merenge, particularly in the use of brass, which give the Aruban roadmarches a distinct flavor. In one song performed by the Taxx Wednesday night, for example, the sequencer produced a nifty brass loop and incorporated elements of techno merengue; in Funky Calypso, the lead was sampling of the Temptations' "Papa Was a Rolling Stone"; and in another, the lyrics and the way the singer, Kevin James (The Baron) delivered them served to break the rhythm's monotony.

Taxx is one of the first bands to tune to the latest twist in the calypso music raging on the British Caribbean islands Dominica, Grenada, Barbados, Antigua... First there was calypso, then it became soul calypso, or soca, and now soca went techno, incorporating hip hop rhythm, relying on sequencer, sampling and loops, and leaving the horns out. The effect is monotonous, hypnotic, and catchy. For the last two years the hits of WKC group of Dominica - Balance Batti and Follow the Leader - have been gaining in popularity on Aruba as well, sharing the airspace during carnival events with the season's top roadmarches.

The jam-back came to Aruba already in the early 1980s, with groups of Saint Maarten that played in carnival, but Taxx and

Claudius Philips and the Oreoband were two groups that first brought out jam-back influenced local roadmarches; since then, many local groups have joined the trend and have had hits. One of the most prominent is Climax, which Thursday night presented nine new songs. In 1996 Claudius Philips, who won a record number of both Calypso King and Roadmarch King titles, came out with Sac'e Boem Boem song, a remake of an older hit from Dominica. Philips gave it a more uptempo rhythm and effective bridges without disturbing the mellow mood of the song, and then weaved into it impossible dance steps which require dancers to "hit the floor" and do a sort of push-up dance. That same year, Taxx's song was Boxing Satan, based on an uptempo rhythm punctuated with breaks - ring side bells, announcing the beginning of new "round." Boxing Satan immediately caught on with the younger carnival crowd. So much so, in fact, that the Taxx trailer during a parade was literally mobbed by all the young Arubans who wanted to jam to Boxing Satan. The song became somewhat controversial, when the general public criticized the lyrics Boxing Satan (the only lyrics of the song) as inappropriate for young people.

"We thought the words express just what the carnival is all about. It tells you to fight the devil in you and come out clean," says Taxx' Kevin James. This year, the band is attempting to get all five songs into the final competition, scheduled for Saturday night. "The songs were purposefully made so different, and if we could have afforded real brass section, they would sound even better. But brass musicians are hard to find, and not only they considerably

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raise the costs of performing at the contest, but a band has to share them with other groups, which makes practicing almost impossible. The Calypso and Roadmarch Contest is a great marketing opportunity for the local musicians, and the groups tend to rely on sequencers to make up for the instruments they cannot afford."

Perhaps this is why so many young groups, especially rap groups, have embraced the jam-back which is conveniently based on electronics. The good rhythm, however monotonous to some, is enough to inject the crowd with dancing frenzy, like during a performance of Ragga Donz Wednesday night, whose song Cowboy was good received by the public.

The influence of jam back is not the first change that took place in Aruban Roadmarch. "On average, you can say that something changed every five to six years," says Roberto Geerman, a DJ with Canal 90 and probably the only person on the island who has on tape all Aruban roadmarches of the last 44 years. "The first roadmarches were mellow, like in the songs of Young Quick Silver of the late sixties, where the music would stop in places to let the singer carry over the tune," says Geerman. The Latin music influences in harmonies, the use of brass section and salsa and merenge rhythms were introduced in the 70s with Lord Boxu. "There was time when the lyrics were purposefully made to have double sense for those that want to recognize it, like in the famous song by Lord Boxu Coming Down Forking." In the eighties, with the debut of Claudius Philips (Mighty Talent), the roadmarches begun to considerably pick up in tempo and add bridges and, by the beginning of this decade, attain attractive breaks followed by funny dancing steps. This was the influence of the French Caribbean islands, and their zouk/cadance rhythms (In late 1970s a couple of groups from Guadeloupe and Martinique played in Aruban carnival parades). This type of roadmarch has been brought up to its final form by Richard Quandus (Lord Tattoo) and the roadmarch Jump With Your Towel. Now, at the end of the century, Aruba has joined the world music movement to-



This Sunday at 3 p.m. Balloon Parade, the first children parade will pass down the streets of Oranjestad. The parade is annually organized by Aruba Tivoli Club, and the first where the newly elected roadmarches get their first carnival performance. Shown in the photo is a roadpiece participating in 1992 Balloon Parade.

ward electronic music, or techno rhythms. Although sometimes criticized to be just a drab rhythm, with no "wine" and thus not "dushi" to jump to with gusto, the emerging new Aruban roadmarch infused with jam-back rhythm is actively and creatively searching for its final form, and does not seem willing to lose the typical harmonies and arrangements of salsa and merenge which give it its exotic flavor.

Saturday night at the Joe Lavaist Sports Park in San Nicolas, the best of the contemporary and emerging types of Aruban roadmarch will be seen in performance of twenty something best soca groups on the island. A treat to enjoy. □

CARNIVAL WEEKEND

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30
4th Aruba Mrs. Carnival Election
RCA Stadium, Oranjestad
At 8 p.m.

JUBU Happening
Las Vegas Plaza, San Nicolas
At 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31
Calypso and Roadmarch Festival
Joe Lavais Ballpark,
San Nicolas At 8 p.m.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1
Tivoli Balloon Parade
Oranjestad
At 3 p.m.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6
23rd Aruba Children
Carnival Queen Election
RCA Stadium, Oranjestad
At 6 p.m.



"Aruba Carnival," the first book about the island's carnival celebration, is a delightful account of Aruba's most important cultural legacy.

The story of carnival is illustrated with over 100 photos and told in 17 chapters, taking the reader to the celebration's backstage, retracing its history, describing carnival events, explaining carnival figures, introducing prominent carnival makers and personalities, to eventually endear the celebration to the reader's heart.

Written with wit and insight by Vanja Oduber, a sociologist, journalist and carnival columnist, the book oversteps its carnival confines to portray Aruba as a place with a history, diverse cultural heritage and

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